

The Paris Commune and its Role in the Anarcho- Marxist Split

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The Paris Commune

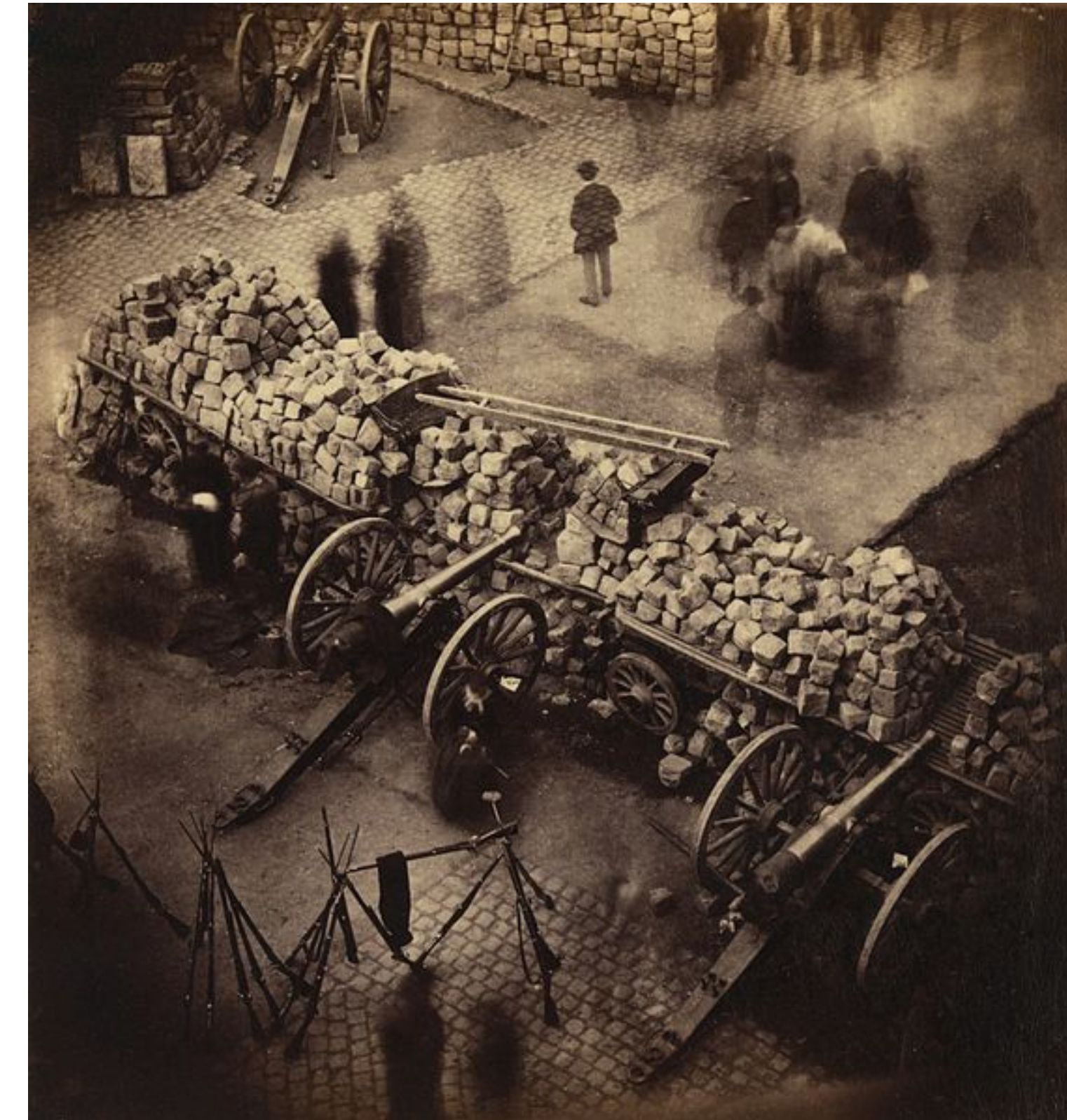
In nineteenth century Europe, France had long been the center for revolutionary activity; by 1871, however, France had just suffered humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, which caused her Empire to fall and Paris to be held under siege.

The newly proclaimed French Third Republic had moved the capital to Versailles to negotiate the terms of surrender with the Germans, leaving Paris to suffer from overcrowding and food shortages. With civil unrest growing the conservative government moved to enforce order on Paris.

This led to a flurry of events in which Paris was barricaded and the city declared itself a free city, the Paris Commune. Organized with socialist ideals, the Commune proclaimed equality and mutual aid. This was to be a proletarian utopia.



The Barricades of Paris



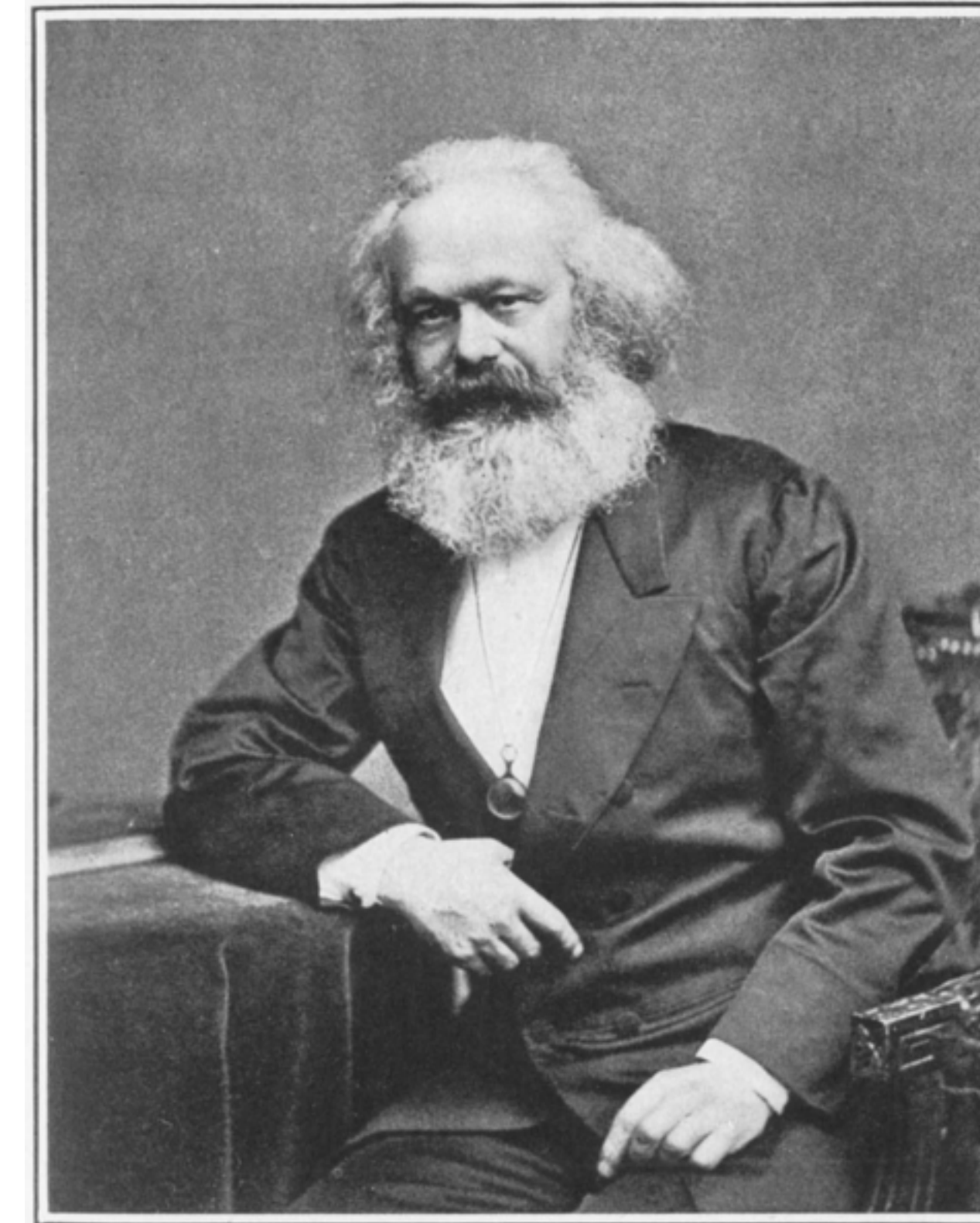
Canons at the Ready

Response to the Commune

The men and women of the Commune equally fought and died at the barricades and in the streets until after 72 days the city was overtaken by the Versailles forces. During the reclamation of the city and subsequent trials for political crimes, nearly 30,000 Communards were killed, captured or exiled to prison colonies.

These events contributed to the larger socialist movement, which was embodied in the First International Workingman's Association, an international movement of leftist supporters. Among these included Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin. The two ideologies represented by the men, Marxism and Anarchism, had long been in petty conflict by the other. The Commune would contribute to and cement the schism between the ideologies, that led to them becoming embittered rivals despite their pursuit of the same goal.

Marx and Bakunin



Karl Marx

The idea of the state is the main dividing line between these two thinkers. Marx advocates a dictatorship of the proletariat. This would be a worker state in order to prepare for the classless utopia achieved through communism. Bakunin advocates spontaneous uprisings, the individual yearning for freedom, and the immediate liquidation of the state in order to escape the tyranny a state inevitably causes. This led to his affiliation with the ideas of anarchism. The disagreements of the two men would shape the discourse of radical politics for decades.



Mikhail Bakunin

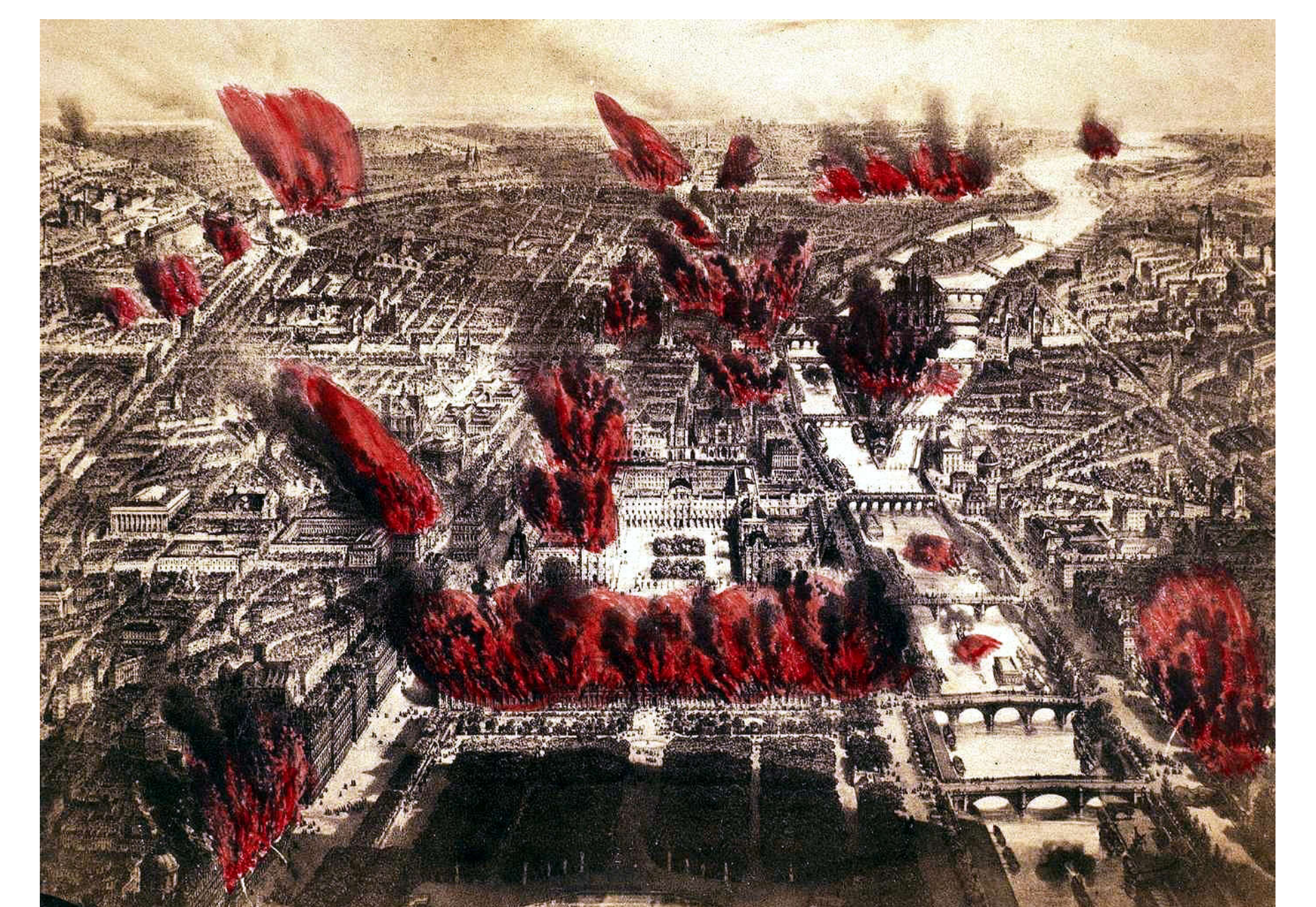


Conclusions

The Paris Commune represents the difficulties of applying ideas to the real world. However it provides a wealthy resource from which to craft new theories from.

Whether it was a planned stage of Marxist evolution or the spontaneous upsurge of individual awareness and desire for liberty from the state, the result was clear. Revolutionary events occur when theory and application entwine.

And the Paris Commune serves as a tangible link of heritage to the resulting socialist movements that would grow in prominence in the 20th and 21st century.



The Murder of Paris